

EXPEDITING ADOPTIONS: Findings and Recommendations



**Presenter, Anthony Conyers, Jr., Commissioner
Virginia Department of Social Services**



BACKGROUND

The General Assembly mandated the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) to conduct a study of policies and procedures related to expediting adoptions of children in and out of the foster care system.



STAKEHOLDERS REPRESENTED ON THE WORKGROUP

- ❑ Adoptive parents
- ❑ Local and state agency representatives
- ❑ Licensed private child placing agencies
- ❑ Juvenile court judges
- ❑ City and County Attorneys
- ❑ Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)



NATIONAL CONSULTANTS

Ada White, Child Welfare League of
America

John Levesque, the National Child Welfare
Resource Center for Adoption



PERMANENCY

- Safety, permanency, and well-being for all children in foster care is the driving philosophy for child welfare practice.
- The recommendations of this study are major steps toward meeting challenges and increasing permanency.



GOALS

The 2003 Federal Child and Family Services Review found that Virginia did not meet the federal child welfare outcome for adoptions of children in foster care.

Virginia met the goal identified in the Program Improvement Plan (PIP) by increasing the number of adoptions made within 24 months from 20.2% to 23.1%.

New Goal

The number of adoptions made within 24 months of entry into foster care will move toward the national average of 32%.



FINDINGS

Court Proceedings

- The process for appealing the termination of parental rights reduces timely adoptions.
- Court procedures increase costs to the Commonwealth.



FINDINGS

Resources

- Lack of adoption - dedicated social workers
- Lack of regional adoption specialists
- Lack of mandated training for foster care and adoption social workers
- Lack of mandated training for foster and adoptive parents
- Need for annual statewide training events



FINDINGS

Child Welfare Data System

- Deficiencies prevent local departments from monitoring progress in achieving timely adoptions.
- Local departments do not receive adequate technical support due to the absence of regional data system trainers.



FINDINGS

Practices

Evidence-based and best practices known to expedite adoptions are not practiced statewide.

Legislative changes in the 2006 session of General Assembly removed barriers for expediting adoptions of children not in foster care.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The expedited adoptions workgroup made the following recommendations based on the findings and consultation with the national experts:



RECOMMENDATION 1

Make the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court a court of record with direct appeal to the Court of Appeals in cases in which the goal of adoption has been approved for a child in foster care and termination of parental rights has been ordered over the objection of the parent.



RECOMMENDATION 2

- ❑ Increase staff positions dedicated to adoption at the state and local levels.
 - ❑ Create five regionally based adoption specialists to provide consultation, training, and on-site technical assistance to LDSS.
 - ❑ Increase the number of dedicated adoption staff at the local level.



RECOMMENDATION 3

Virginia should mandate adoption competency training for all foster care and adoption workers through statutory language similar to training for CPS workers.



RECOMMENDATION 4

Virginia should provide the resources necessary to fund a minimum number of required pre-service and in-service training hours for foster and adoptive parents.



RECOMMENDATION 5

Virginia should fund an annual statewide adoption training conference for all partners in the adoption process.



RECOMMENDATION 6

State funds should be provided through the Appropriations Act to supplement federal money used for post adoption services.



RECOMMENDATION 7

The State should ensure the means to provide on-going monitoring and modifications to the state child welfare data system.



RECOMMENDATION 8

Create five dedicated positions within VDSS to provide statewide training and technical assistance to LDSS on the state child welfare data system.